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DORGAN, SNOWE, MCCAIN, STABENOW INTRODUCE BIPARTISAN PRESCRIPTION DRUG IMPORTATION BILL

(WASHINGTON, D.C.) – U.S. Senators Byron Dorgan (D-ND), Olympia Snowe (R-ME), John McCain (R-AZ), and Debbie Stabenow (D-MI) introduced critical drug importation legislation today that will reduce the cost of prescription drugs in the United States. The Senators said their legislation, the “Pharmaceutical Market Access and Drug Safety Act,” will bring consumers immediate relief and will ultimately force the pharmaceutical industry to lower drug prices in the United States.

The Congressional Budget Office estimates the bill would save American consumers \$50 billion over the next decade, including more than \$10 billion in federal government savings.

The bill allows U.S.-licensed pharmacies and drug wholesalers to import FDA-approved medications from Canada, Europe, Australia, New Zealand and Japan and pass along the savings to their American customers. This approach will allow Americans to benefit from prices in these countries, which are 35 to 55 percent lower than in the U.S., while still enabling consumers to receive medications at their local pharmacy. The legislation would also allow individual consumers to purchase prescription drugs for their own personal use from safe, reliable, FDA-inspected Canadian pharmacies.

The legislation contains strong safeguards to prohibit drug counterfeiting or any other practices that would put the consumer at risk, and applies only to FDA-approved prescription drugs produced in FDA-approved plants from countries with comparable safety standards.

Dorgan and Snowe introduced bipartisan legislation that had over 30 Senate co-sponsors in the last session of Congress, including President Obama and Senator John McCain.

The President signaled support for this legislation, stating in the 2010 Budget proposal, “The Budget supports the Food and Drug Administration’s (FDA’s) new efforts to allow Americans to buy safe and effective drugs from other countries...”

“This is a common sense measure that will save both everyday Americans and the federal government billions of dollars, and improve the overall health of millions of people,” said Dorgan. “The U.S. consumers are paying the highest prices in the world for prescription drugs, and that’s unfair. By allowing access to identical, less expensive FDA-approved prescription drugs, we will be providing some relief to the American consumers, and force pharmaceutical companies to re-price their prescription drugs here in the U.S.”

“As Americans struggle with increasing health care costs during the deepest recession since World War II, more and more individuals are forced to skip doses or split pills, neglecting their health needs to keep food on the table,” said Senator Snowe, a member of the Health Subcommittee.

“By implementing a safe prescription drug importation program, we will increase competition within the domestic prescription drug market which, in turn, will ensure more Americans have access to safe and affordable medications. While we still have much to do to ensure universal access to health care, no solution will be sustainable if we do not address the fact that our health costs are approximately double that of other industrialized nations. This bill takes a critical step to reduce those costs to make affordable access a reality.”

“For far too long Americans have seen health care costs – especially prescription drug costs – increase year after year,” said Senator John McCain. “Re-importation legislation would allow access to safe and effective prescription drugs at much lower prices than are available in the United States. If enacted, the legislation will provide the much needed relief to American families, especially seniors and others on fixed incomes, who are facing tough economic times.”

“This legislation provides a safe and secure framework to allow our government to help citizens and businesses lower their health care costs. We in Michigan know too well the price discrepancy between U.S. and Canadian drugs,” Stabenow said. “Across Michigan’s three bridges to Canada, my constituents could buy safe, FDA-approved drugs at a fraction of the cost compared to their neighborhood pharmacy. Unfortunately, no one except the drug companies can import prescription drugs. Pharmacists in my state would like to be able to do business with their counterparts in Canada and other industrialized nations so that they can offer their customers medicine at the best prices.”

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